Vernacular Illusionism in a 16th Century Book of Hours

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By

Erin Hannah Riddiford

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Undergraduate Thesis Committee

Karl Whittington, Ph. D, Advisor

Barbara Haeger, Ph. D.

Eric Johnson, Ph. D.

The Ohio State University's Rare Books and Manuscripts Library houses a manuscript Book of Hours (MS.MR.10) that at first appears conventional. The picture cycle it holds follows the life of Christ and the Virgin, and it features a calendar, the Obsecro Te, the Penitential Psalms, and the Office of the Dead.[1] It is not until one has access to MS.MR.10's imagery and its provenance that one realizes the codex is not wholly standard; while its subject matter is typical, its style is intriguing. Conspicuous shadows back divine figures and some subtly interact with their frames in its miniatures. But these attempts at illusionism are contradicted by the rudimentary nature in which the figures and scenes have been painted. Dated to 1540, MS.MR.10 is quite late for a manuscript Book of Hours, especially one that contains a mixture of medievalizing elements and attempts at more modern illusionistic techniques. In this essay, I argue that the codex's imagery, particularly a miniature of the Madonna and Child (Figure 1), presents a kind of 'vernacular illusionism,' where elite illuminating styles have been imitated by a less-skilled practitioner, creating an interesting mix of ambitious visual strategies with rough execution. After briefly describing the manuscript's material condition and contents, I will explore this unique blend through an examination of its most interesting image and the visual culture that produced it.

The contents of MS.MR.10 are encased in thin brown leather stretched over pasteboard and stamped with liquid gold. Both covers include a roundel of the Crucifixion, with decorative vines and swirls flourishing up the spine. Smooth, white vellum sheets covered in ink script and paintings in tempera make up the contents within. Each folio is ruled in red or brown ink and the

[1]Frank Coulson, "Codices Latini Onienses (1): Latin Manuscripts in the William Oxley Thompson Memorial Library of the Ohio State University," 200.

text blocks with painting are separated from the excess page by frames of liquid gold outlined in light brown.

MS.MR.10 was acquired by the Rare Books and Manuscripts Library at the Ohio State University in the late 1980s and localized to the southwest of France by Frank Coulson, director of OSU's Paleography Institute. Coulson catalogued twelve of the Latin manuscripts in OSU's collection, reviewing their contents, describing the physical makeup of the codices, such as their binding and decoration, and determining their origin and provenance. He notes the "highly calligraphic Gothic script" written in brown ink that makes up MS.MR.10's text and locates the handwriting style to southwest France.[2] He also concludes that the binding is original, as the stitching matches other sixteenth-century French productions. Moreover, Coulson's analysis has determined that the Book of Hours is in the Use of Poitiers, with a calendar in French and Latin and a prosopopoeia, also in French, that introduces the text. It is the prosopopoeia on fol. 1r that dates the codex to 1540 and tells the reader that it was originally owned by Charlotte Bouton, "the glory of Angouleme," who had the book made to "pay a holy rent to Christ, her dearest love."[3] On fol. 2v a frontispiece depicting St. Peter and an unidentified blue coat of arms with a liquid gold chevron was added to the work likely in the 19th century. Interestingly, the full-page scene is painted in a pseudo Late-Gothic style: St. Peter's body is tall, thin, and stands in contrapposto, but does not match the rendition of figures in the original pages of the book, which have thick limbs, wide set eyes, full lips, and substantial, triangular shaped noses. Their features seem especially large when compared to the daintiness of St. Peter.

[2] Frank Coulson, "Codices Latini Onienses," 201.
[3] The prosopopoeia, in full, as translated by Frank Coulson: "it is owned by Charlotte Bouton who is the glory of Angouleme and who, in the month of August, 1540, had this book made to pay a holy rent to Christ, her dearest love. The reader is asked to pray for her and her husband, Chormelet, Sieur de Brisebarre that they may one day live in heaven." From "Codices Latini Onienses," 201.

The manuscript's sixteenth-century miniatures consist of a full evangelist cycle and popular scenes from the life of Christ. John, Luke, Mark, and Mathew, accompanied by their attributes, are pictured writing their gospels with quills on parchment in five-line high framed miniatures (fol. 19r, fol. 20v, fol. 22r, and fol. 23v). Each overlaps the bottom edge of the frames, creating an intriguing effect in which the evangelists appear to float between the realm of the picture and the realm of the viewer. Luke, Mark, and Mathew are seated in stone walled rooms in front of blue or red hung fabrics embroidered with gold – cloths of honor that accentuate their importance, while St. John reclines on the grassy hill of Patmos. The life of Christ images include the Annunciation to the Shepherds, the Agony in the Garden, and the Presentation at the Temple, among others (Figure 2). As with the gospel writers, all of the figures are placed close to the picture plane and little emphasis is given to landscapes or deep space. In each of the illuminated scenes, however, details, such as highlights in hair and beards, angel wings, and folds of drapery, were added in liquid gold on top of the tempera paint.

In seeking to confirm Coulson's localization of the manuscript, I have located several other French books whose figures are comparable to those of MS.MR.10's. Miniatures with analogous use of liquid gold highlighting, and figures with simple triangular noses and large, undefined hands are found in a Book of Hours illuminated in Bourges, France by Jean Colombe and his workshop, circa 1480 (Figure 3). The depiction of St. Luke's nose and lips in profile as he paints the Virgin, is strikingly similar to one of the Magi's profiles on fol. 71r. Their noses emerge from high in their foreheads, protruding from their faces immensely and ending above plump, red lips. A Parisian example also housed in Ohio State's Rare Books and Manuscripts Library matches the quickly painted brushstrokes seen in MS.MR.10 (Figure 4). This Book of Hours from circa 1515 features printed text on vellum and hand painted illustrations, that have

attempted to cover once visible woodcuts of similar scenes, in which figures and details have been hastily drawn in, and in places darkly outlined. In the Nativity scene, the brushstrokes are especially visible, most notably in the illusion of brick painted into the stone wall and the gold embroidery that embellishes the Virgin's robe and the drapery behind her. Similar hurried brush marks are found in the images of MS.MR.10 and are especially evident in the liquid gold cross hatching applied to each figure and the unsteady hand that rendered the frames surrounding the miniatures. Thus, while I haven't located a manuscript from southwestern France whose style exactly matches MS.MR.10, other French manuscripts from the years around 1500 confirm the general attribution of the book (as well, of course, as the use of the French vernacular in the book's introductory inscription).

Throughout the text, alternating red and blue square blocks with one-line capitals in liquid gold indicate the beginning of verses, while similar three-line initials with white ornamentation establish entire sections. Decorated catchwords are found through the whole of the codex, as well, and are composed of the same brown ink as the text, indicating that the scribe's hand likely created them. While many of the markings are simple ornamental vines and semi-circles that frame the following page's first word, on fol. 87v a man's face has been drawn, the catchword written on a cap that sits across his forehead.

Though several other details about this manuscript are interesting (the insertion of the 19th century medievalizing image of St. Peter at the beginning of the book is a detail that begs further study), my own study of the codex has been focused on a particularly intriguing image of the Madonna and Child, which is the first original image in the Hours. This illumination, a framed image that covers three-quarters of the page, is placed after the calendar on fol. 15r. A three-line initial and five lines of text, the beginning of the Obsecro Te, sit below the image and

are included within the bounds of a gold frame outlined in black. By the 15th century, a little over one hundred years before MS.MR.10 was produced, the Obsecro Te and the O Intemerata prayers were "fairly standard" additions to Books of Hours.[4] Both prayers address the Virgin and "seek her aid as intercessor to God for the benefit of the sinner."[5] Roger Wieck has determined that about two thirds of the time these prayers are accompanied by illustrations, traditionally of Mary and her son, miniatures of which were painted to inspire the requests made in the prayers. The Obsecro Te and the O Intemerata's location is not fixed, unlike the Calendar, the Gospel Lessons, and the Office of the Dead, "whose positions in a Book of Hours are nearly constant," according to Wieck.[6] He notes that frequently, however, the prayers to the Virgin "are found following the Gospel Lessons and preceding the Hours of the Virgin."[7] In MS.MR.10 the Obsecro Te begins directly after the Calendar and ends right before the Gospel Lessons. The Obsecro Te emphasizes Mary's "special role in the Incarnation and reminds her of the joys of motherhood," hence why the accompanying image is often of her and the Christ Child.[8] The Obsecro Te is a prayer in which "the reader addresses the Virgin directly, in plaintive tones and in first person."[9] The images of the Madonna and Child that often go with it depict "what the patron sees in his own mind's eye while praying, [they also show] what he hopes to experience, in the eternity of heaven, as the result of the very prayer he recites."[10] In the case of MS.MR.10, the viewer moves to spiritual vision, where the corporeal and otherworldly combine, through reading the prayer and consulting the Madonna and Child image. Once fully engrossed, she is in a space where the Virgin and her son are physically present in the page before her.

[4] Roger S. Wieck, *Time Sanctified: The Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life* (New York: G. Braziller, 2001), 94.
[5] Wieck, *Time Sanctified: The Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life,* 94.
[6] Wieck, *Time Sanctified,* 94.
[7] Wieck, *Time Sanctified,* 94.
[8] Wieck, *Time Sanctified,* 94.
[9] Wieck, *Time Sanctified,* 94.
[10] Wieck, *Time Sanctified,* 95.

In the illumination the Virgin and Christ are depicted in a close-up view, seated at the edge of the picture plane, and separated from the text by a thick black line. The text of the Obsecro Te overlaps the right side of the frame that surrounds the illumination, in a similar manner as the Evangelist's arms and robes do in their scenes. The prayer's presence is emphasized by its inclusion within the gold frame- the viewer must muse on both the written word and the image to achieve spiritual sight. In the image, mother and child are both depicted somberly, with closed lips and downcast eyes that look off away from the other. Christ sits upright on his mother's lap, his back supported by her left arm as her right rests across his legs. He subtly reaches towards her. Both are crowned with opaque gold halos rendered as solid circles and outlined in black; these halos hover behind and above their heads, emanating from the nape of their necks. Mary wears a brown dress flecked with gold and wraps her head with a white cloth. A rich blue veil with gold accents embroidered on its edges covers the white cloth and cascades over her shoulders, flowing out of view. Jesus's head is left uncovered, his hair an auburn shade and cut short. He wears a simple white shift with gold details on his wrists and around his neck. The background to the image appears to be a hanging red fabric, embroidered with a pattern of gold circles. Shadows cast by the left and top edge of the gold frame and the figures' bodies darken the undulating tapestry.

The illuminator's hand is visible throughout the scene; its rendering reflects none of the smooth, slick surfaces so popular among French and Netherlandish illuminations and panel paintings typical of this period. Thick strokes of blue line Mary's veil, coarsely indicating the folds of drapery. The skin of the figures is textured with quick, short marks of white, with grey in the contours, and peachy nude against their cheeks. The various parts of their clothing and bodies are defined by black paint, which is thicker at the edge of their silhouettes and thinner in the lines

that separate the pale colors of their hands, faces, and necks from the surrounding fabric. The gold frame has been treated similarly when outlined; the black paint runs thin against the edges of the left side of the frame, while the right is much wider, as if indicating shadow in a similar vein as the deeper red does on the background fabric in the interior. This play of shadow, as well as the use of a devotional close-up in manuscript painting, is unusual and harkens to the religious panel paintings from the 15th and 16th centuries, like those produced by Jan van Eyck and Rogier van der Weyden, among many other artists they influenced.

Thus, in numerous ways this image is typical, but several of its details are unique, and speak to larger issues that are worth investigating further. In particular, the illumination's strange framing devices, its use of shadows, and its use of the devotional close-up speak to an engagement with major trends in both illumination and monumental painting during the period. In the following sections, I will explore each of these issues in turn, as I seem to uncover the ways in which the image structures its engagement with the viewer. But first, I will delve into the tradition of illumination from which MS.MR.10 emerges.

Illuminated manuscripts have been deemed "some of the most stunning words of art of the Renaissance," an interesting statement, given that the invention of movable type in the 1450s gave rise to the printing press, resulting in an explosion of printed materials by the late 15th and 16th century.[11] Instead of being replaced entirely by print, however, the audience for manuscripts endured, particularly among royal and aristocratic patrons.[12] With this shift, manuscript illumination often became even more lavish: the miniatures produced by a skilled hand in all their colorful glory were clearly more pleasing to the eye than the woodcuts and engravings that

[11] Thomas Kren and Scot McKendrick. *Illuminating the Renaissance: The Triumph of Flemish Manuscript Painting in Europe (*Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2003), 1.
[12] Kren and McKendrick. *Illuminating the Renaissance*, 8.

replaced them in more cheaply printed books.[13] The style of these woodcuts and engravings, however, may have influenced that of later book paintings, such as those in MS.MR.10. In the Book of Hours' illuminations, the framing of the scenes, their lack of detail, and the close proximity of the figures to the picture plane show similarities to woodcuts of the period. Still miniatures filled with trompe l'oeil effects and window niche compositions became increasingly common as the line between manuscript illumination and panel painting began to blur. Innovations in rich surfaces, expensive materials, and illusionistic effects seemed to move in both directions, from manuscript page to panel painting and from painting back to the book.

While a common Christian faith shared by painters and illuminators, and some overlap in the way that painters were trained, naturally led to their propensity to use similar motifs to represent religious history,[14] more than a similarity of pictorial composition united the artists in the late 15th century. Records of guild membership show that some prominent illuminators, Gerard David and Simon Marmion to name just two, belonged to both painter's and illuminator's guilds.[15] David is even known to have produced the same scenes on both panel and parchment, and there are records of Jan van Eyck pasting vellum to wood panels as a white foundation for his paintings. The two types of artmaking overlapped in both production and appearance.

Portraiture became a leading genre in panel painting in the late fifteenth century as evidenced by the work produced by Hugo van der Goes, Van der Weyden, and Van Eyck, and the genre's influence was soon apparent in miniatures, whose depictions of holy figures often

[13] Kren and McKendrick. *Illuminating the Renaissance*, 8-16.
[14] Thomas Kren and Maryon W. Ainsworth, "Illuminators and Painters: Artistic Exchanges and Interrelationships," In *Illuminating the Renaissance: The Triumph of Flemish Manuscript Painting in Europe*, by Thomas Kren and Scot McKendrick (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2003), 35.
[15] Catherine Reynolds, "Illuminators and Painters' Guilds," In *Illuminating the Renaissance: The Triumph of Flemish Manuscript Painting in Europe*, by Thomas Kren and Scot McKendrick (Los Angeles : Getty Publications, 2003), 17.

mirrored the close-up viewpoints of panel portraits.[16] The panelists' "mastery of light, texture, and space" was often imitated in book painting, though the subjects tended to be religious figures rather than contemporary sitters. Portrait-like close-ups of religious figures feature in Simon Bening's *Stein Quadriptych*, a four-panel piece with 64 compact scenes dating to the mid-16th century (Figure 5). Bening was one of the last great illuminators in Europe, but also worked outside of manuscript as evidenced by his *Quadriptych*. His altarpiece comprised of miniatures with figures pushed close to the picture plane, though, demonstrates the tie between book painting and panel painting; artist and composition style were fluid across both mediums.

Manuscript illumination evolved from within its own sector as well, beginning most dramatically in the 1470s in Flanders. Famously in the style often referred to as the "Ghent-Bruges School," Dutch and Flemish illuminators used illusionistic effects to unite the frames surrounding miniatures with their interior scenes through "complementary naturalistic forms" found in both.[17] This integration of *mise en page* elements proved to be highly influential and continued to be used well into the 16th century. These illuminators employed trompe l'oeil effects on their pages as well by painting objects such as faux pilgrimage badges hooked into the parchment, mimicking the real practice in a two-dimensional form, and insects crawling over the sheets, their shadows professing that they are in fact present.[18] Hidden brushstrokes and to-scale creatures, objects, and shadows seem to confirm their authenticity.

Trompe l'oeil objects are known for deceiving the eye, as they often appear to pierce the viewer's space, as three dimensional objects do. Used in antiquity, the interest in trompe l'oeil

[16] Thomas Kren, "Part 5: New Directions in Manuscript Painting, circa 1510-1561," In *Illuminating the Renaissance: The Triumph of Flemish Manuscript Painting in Europe*, by Thomas Kren and Scot McKendrick (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2003), 411.
[17] Kren and McKendrick. *Illuminating the Renaissance*, 1-4.
[18] Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, and Virginia Roehrig Kaufmann, "The Sanctification of Nature: Observations on the Origins of Trompe L'oeil in Netherlandish Book Painting of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries." *The J. Paul Getty Museum Journal* (1991): 48.

was reinvigorated in the 15th century, in both painting and illumination. Leon Battista Alberti wrote in the mid-15th century that paintings displaying perspective are "windows that can present a true picture of the world."[19] This emphasis on the window was sometimes taken literally, through painted ledges that jut forward, implying their proximity to the viewer, as objects fill the open space behind them. In this way picture surfaces become membranes between two realities.[20] Paradoxically, these works boasting of naturalism can remind viewers that what they are seeing is art, "an object, not reality itself,"[21] mere paint applied by a skilled hand. Their intense naturalism borders on artificiality, which is noticed by the human eye.

Flemish illuminators' adoption of illusionistic effects soon gave them international status throughout Europe as elite patrons came to prefer the Flemish style over that of their local illuminators.[22] Connections across royal courts, notably those of the Habsburgs and Burgundians, spread the style, and since richly decorated books could show off the owner's piety and status through the wealth and labor required to produce such prayer books, they became desirable across Europe.[23] Workshops relied on pattern books as sources for religious scenes and borders to meet the "demand for richly decorated books in the new style without sacrificing the high level of quality that the most discerning patrons demanded."[24] These patterns were used for generations, which ensured the longevity of the designs and allowed them to trickle down from the courts to more modest patrons over time and still retain their characteristics.

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[19] Sybille Erbert-Schifferer, *Deceptions and Illusions: Five Centuries of Trompe l'Oeil Painting* (Hampshire: Lund Humphries, 2002), 267.
[20] Erbert-Schifferer, *Deceptions and Illusions,* 22.
[21] Erbert-Schifferer, *Deceptions and Illusions,* 289.
[22] Thomas Kren,"Part 4: Consolidation and Renewal: Manuscirpt Painting under the Hapsburgs, circa 1485-1510," In *Illuminating the Renaissance: The Triumph of Flemish Manuscript Painting in Europe*, by Thomas Kren and Scot McKendrick (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2003), 314.
[23] Kren and Ainsworth, "Illuminators and Painters: Artistic Exchanges and Interrelationships," 53.
[24] Kren and McKendrick. *Illuminating the Renaissance,* 6.

This spread of Flemish styles across Europe and dependence on design patterns in workshops can partly explain the archaic style found in MS.MR.10. The manuscript likely existed a bit outside of the elite networks of artists and patrons that I have been describing; the ways in which pictorial innovations in major cities and courts found their way to more provincial areas, and to less elite patrons, remains perhaps too-little understood. Thus, the codex at OSU provides evidence that points to its production in a workshop near Poitiers, France around the year 1540, but its stylistic elements echo themes made popular in Netherlandish oil on panel works from one hundred years prior, through rendered by a far less proficient hand. The artist's clear desire to create depth through shadow and his use of framing devices is reminiscent of the trompe l'oeil painted manuscripts that swept through European high society during the late 15th century. It seems that decades later these illusionistic tricks were attempted by a less skilled illuminator who may have become aware of the particular style through pattern books or other manuscripts that traveled through many hands to get to him, as well as through panel paintings. Despite the rise of printed materials, a hand produced Book of Hours was still favored by MS.MR.10's patron, perhaps for the religious significance of the hand-crafted object, or the archaizing or historicizing devotional associations that such a book would have held. The immense time and labor required to produce the codex may have heightened its religiosity as the intense effort put in to it could be seen as labor done to please God.

MS.MR.10's Madonna and Child gives only a limited space for the figures, who are compressed between red fabric, presumably the backing of a cloth throne, and possibly the same one present in the following scenes, with the picture plane marked by the gold frame. The space presented is private and encourages an intimate encounter with the divine figures; the viewer perceives herself to be alone with them. The cloth throne was used as a framing device by Van

Eyck and other painters of the period, in their panels depicting the Madonna and Child. Van Eyck's thrones are erected behind the Virgin and Christ in paintings such as his *Enthroned Madonna* (Figure 6), and larger constructions that include saints, such as *Madonna and Child Enthroned with saints and Canon Joris van der Peale*. Intricately woven textiles cover the thrones of these paintings, making canopies that protect the heads of the figures below, and cascade underfoot away from them.

Recent research has done much to demonstrate the incredible material presence and worldly connections that these fabrics evoked for viewers. Donna Cottrell writes that cloths of honor reflected the status of the figure placed in front of them in the hierarchy of earthly or heavenly court. Her research has concluded that these fabrics hold a sanctity because of the "reverence bestowed upon luxurious textiles in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance" due to the "West's contact with Byzantium," where "imperial courts literally sparkled with textiles of silk and precious metals."[25] Fabrics are also highly regarded in the Bible; Veronica's veil and miracle producing fragments of saint's clothing allude to the power of richly decorated cloth. Furthermore, these cloths of silk and metal thread were worn by priests during the celebration of masses and used to wrap up sacred relics and bring attention to the importance of statues by being hung behind them. The materials they were made of, rich wools or exotic silks, embellished with silver and gold threads and pearls, gave them the "special properties of light-properties that not only reflected the essence or presence of Divine light, but could direct one's thoughts to the Divine in mystical meditation."[26] The "majestic textiles thus became inseparably

[25] Cottrell, "Unraveling the Mystery of Jan van Eyck's Cloths of Honor: The *Ghent Altarpiece*," From *Encountering Medieval Textiles and Dress. The New Middle Ages (*New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 174.
[26] Cottrell, "Unraveling the Mystery of Jan van Eyck's Cloths of Honor: The *Ghent Altarpiece*," *(*New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 175.

associated with Christ, the saints, sacred events, and sacred places."[27] MS.MR.10's cloth thrones lack the sensual tactility made apparent in Van Eyck's paintings, but still function as a sacred fabric that announces and stages the presence of Divine figures. The motif is repeated in four of the six images that include Mary and works to connect the Biblical narrative across the Book of Hour's pages.[28]

Additionally, MS.MR.10's Madonna and Child image adopts the style of the devotional close-up. The devotional portrait developed out of the use of half-length compositions for the portraits of rulers and nobles. The mixing of the secular trend with religious content is attributed to Van der Weyden, and was quickly picked up by the Ghent-Bruges School of manuscript illumination in the 1470s.[29] In the early 16th century, half-length close-ups of biblical figures were featured prominently in French illuminator Jean Bouchichon's *Grandes Heures d'Anne de Bretagne*, indicating that the style had spread out of the Low Countries.[30] Sixten Ringbom writes that devotional portraits "provided the owner with a source of edification and guidance, and a recipient for prayer and supplication."[31] The images were used to help the viewer forge a more personal connection with the divine figures they depict.

Despite the extensive condemnation of image veneration found in the Bible, from its earliest history Christians looked for ways around these concerns of idolatry. Defending cult images, St. John of Damascus states that "the honor shown to the image is transferred to the prototype and whoever honors an image honors the person represented by it."[32] Hence, it became possible to place statues and paintings in churches as worshipers were not revering a manmade

[27] Cottrell, "Unraveling the Mystery of Jan van Eyck's Cloths of Honor: The *Ghent Altarpiece*," 175.
[28] Kren, "Part 5: New Directions in Manuscript Painting, circa 1510-1561," 412.
[29] Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative : The Rise of the Dramatic Close-up in Fifteenth-Century Devotional Painting, (*Abo : Abo Akademi, 1965), 45.
[30] Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative,* 210.
[31] Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative,* 13.
[32]Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative,* 12.

image, but the true being. Using a cult image to help oneself "arrive at an understanding of more abstract matters" was simply like referencing diagrams and charts in non-religious texts.[33] St. Augustine's tripartite analysis of vision became highly influential in the medieval period. His three stages of seeing, corporeal, spiritual, and intellectual, explain ordinary and supernatural vision from lowest to highest form. Corporeal sight is "that of the eyes" and that which perceives objects present before the seer. Spiritual "consists of the recollection of objects earlier seen, or else the imagining of things given in a verbal description." Finally, intellectual vision "deals with matters intelligible, things that do not have images." Similarly, Bernard of Clairvaux encouraged imageless devotion within his sect, where a devotional image was consulted before one turns inside oneself to connect in the mind with God.[34] Supported by significant intellectual justifications, use of images in religious settings boomed in the high and later Middle Ages.

Scholars, including Ringbom, have suggested that the increased number of recorded visionary experiences in which one communed with divine figures during the high and later medieval period were inspired by the mystics witnessing devotional imagery, as was displayed in churches, and subsequently picturing the statues and painted figures coming to life in their dreams or imaginations.[35] Saints Hildegard of Bingen and Catherine of Siena are two monastic examples of such mystics. St. Catherine's contemporary biographer recorded that the St. Dominic who appeared to her in her dream did so "in that form in which she has seen him painted in the church."[36] This phenomenon of religious people appearing in visions as they have been rendered by artists has been chronicled by other accounts as well. In due course, visionary

[33] Bret Rothstein, *Sight and Spirituality in Early Netherlandish Painting (*New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 58.
[34]Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative,* 16.
[35] Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative,* 8.
[36] Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative,* 8.

experiences and imageless devotion became desirable among those who lived outside the monastic orders. Influenced by mysticism, "private devotion assumed an individualistic character which is most apparent in the fundamental accessory of devotion," the Book of Hours.[37] Evidence of this individualized devotion practiced by laypeople is found in the Prayer Book of James IV of Scotland held in the Vienna National Library (Cod. 1897). The miniature on fol. 243v shows Queen Margaret praying before a vision of the Virgin. In reaction to this image, Ringbom concludes that "since the aureole here appears together with an ordinary person, not a visionary saint, it cannot be intended to represent an apparition, but rather a mental image to which the Queen directs her attention."[38] Queen Margaret has reached the final, and highly sought after, stage of religious contemplation, the mental image, after moving away from corporeal sight and devotional artwork. She herself is not a saint and does not receive a vision, but she can still connect with religious figures through imageless devotion.

Similar concepts are at play in MS.MR.10's Madonna and Child close-up. Contained within the leaves of a Book of Hours, the figures operate intimately with the reader as she holds the codex in her palms, close to her face, to take in the imagery and text. The shallow space displayed in the illumination and the closeness of the figures encourages the viewer to commune with the Virgin and her son. The illuminator's attempt at illusionism through the shadows the figures cast imply that they are physically before the viewer, simply imprisoned in the page. The attempt the artist made at depicting the divine naturalistically may point to a desire to use images such as this as the stepping stone to imageless devotion and visionary experience.

The frames that encompass each of MS.MR.10's images break from trends in traditions of illumination style as well. The gilded borders do more than act as conventional frames: the

[37] Ringbom, "Devotional Images and Imaginative Devotions," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (1969): 164.
[38] Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative*, 21-22.

Madonna and Child's cast shadows into the figures' space and the Evangelists touch and interact with their simple frames. St. John most clearly leans over his lower border, resting his right, cloak covered arm on the ledge as he writes his gospel on a scroll (Figure 7). His interaction with the frame causes viewers to determine that he penetrates their space as well as remaining within his own. Here the frame is painted as if it is the boundary to an opening in the vellum page, a window to a painted realm.[39] This illusionistic technique is found in Flemish manuscripts that employ trompe l'oeil effects and Renaissance window portraits, both of which may have influenced the style of MS.MR.10. As a result of the framing devices, the images in the codex are comprised of three levels, the first being the page they are painted on, the second the boundary line between spaces marked by the painted frames, and the third the illusionistic space the opens within them. Victor Stochita writes that "the painting with a painted frame establishes itself twice as a representation: it is the image of a painting."[40] Bordered by vellum, the figures in MS.MR.10's painted frames establish that they cannot actually be physically present, but the shadows cast by the gold frames do their best to suggest otherwise. The frame must be real and have mass since it produces a shadow on the interior scene of the Divine, thus suggesting a toggling between bodily and spiritual vision. Yet what is so fascinating about this particular manuscript example is that, while it uses these techniques to suggest illusionistic and spatial complications, its rendering contains none of the trompe-l'oeil finish of the kinds of images that Stoichita and others write about. It is illusion depicted in a much more humble or vernacular vein.

[39] Kaufmann, and Kaufmann,"The Sanctification of Nature," 49.
[40] Victor I. Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image,* trans. Anne-Marie Glasheen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 53.

Stochita's interest in self-aware images led him to studying the interaction of shadow and painted frames that became a popular motif in the 16th century. He notes that artists of the period took an interest in projecting the "frame into the area of the image," casting a shadow on the painting within.[41] This contemporary technique is found in MS.MR.10's Madonna and Child image despite the medievalizing rendition of the figures that harkens back to previous centuries. In fact, shadows were "virtually ignored by the artists of the [Medieval] period,"[42] which makes the Madonna and Child image all the more jarring to viewers familiar with traditional medieval artistic practices. Instead, shadows became more common in later works whose artists studied one-point perspective. These artists helped to develop the nuances of the technique necessary to convincingly depict shadows; for example, Leonardo da Vinci noted that shadows were required in perspectival images to define figures.[43] Yet shadows can do more than define figures in scenes: their existence shows off the human nature of the beings who cast them. Discernable shadows signify the "real presence" of forms in paintings and tell the viewer that the figures "possess volume and that they occupy quantifiable space."[44] If every human in the real world is tangible and casts a shadow, then surely a painted being who does the same must also be present despite their miniscule size and imprisonment in a page.

Creating a human presence for the holy figures seems to have been the illuminator's goal in MS.MR.10. Throughout the picture cycle he made use of illusionistic techniques in an attempt to convince the viewer that his scenes are windows opening into an extant painted realm. The Madonna and Child image's conspicuous shadows catch viewers' eyes, telling them the divine

[41] Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image*, 57.
[42] Victor I Stoichita, *A Short History of the Shadow,* trans. Anne-Marie Glasheen (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), 44.
[43] Stoichita, *A Short History of the Shadow,* 62.
[44] Stoichita, *A Short History of the Shadow,* 85-89.

figures are there to interact with them. Since it is the first miniature of the original book, the image and its illusionistic details set the tone of the images to follow- the later images are also to be read as present. The shadows cast on the background "cloth" are caused by a light source emanating from outside and to the left of the painted frame, perhaps originating from our world and then entering the pictorial scene. Interestingly, the choice of a left light source follows the advice of Italian Renaissance painter Cennino Cennini who wrote in his *Il Libro dell' Arte* that "soft light streaming from the left is a guarantee of success."[45] His writing may have been influential to monumental artists who could have translated the technique across Europe, allowing it to come in contact with MS.MR.10's French illuminator. The shadow it produces casts an uneven and undefined shape on the red ground behind Mary and Christ, implying that rippling fabric hangs behind them, and signals that they and the gilded frame are solid entities placed in front of it. Shadows also exist behind the Evangelists and predominantly the Virgin in larger scenes throughout the Book of Hours.

Scholars have long noted that illusionism can have a religious function, making clear why MS.MR.10's illuminator made attempts at it despite his lack of technical skill. Bret Rothstein and Craig Harbison in particular have written extensively on the use of realism in devotional art and its purpose of inciting piety, focusing especially on the work of Van Eyck and Van der Weyden. Their paintings made use of religious imagery to help viewers connect with holy figures by featuring their likenesses to allow viewers to focus on their reverence. Van Eyck's panels are painted meticulously, and every surface texture is distinguishable. His images are so realistic that viewers, in their awe at what he has achieved in mere pigment, are reminded that what they are peering into is not a room in which the Virgin sits enthroned, but flat colors, an

[45] Stoichita, *A Short History of the Shadow*, 89.

artificial scene. This reminder encourages moving beyond the image and into one's mind. Hence, "if properly harnessed, suitably trained, and carefully guided, sight could put one on the mind's road to God."[46]

As discussed above, during the late medieval period visionary experiences were highly sought after. Interestingly, the popularity of pilgrimage and worshipping of cult images played a large part in the phenomenon. Stories spread telling of cult statues that came to life and performed miracles, and pilgrims purchased medals with mirrors set in them to capture the rays emanating from these miraculous objects so they could take the magic home with them.[47] While physical pilgrimage was undoubtedly prevalent in Europe at this time, the ideas of modern devotion, or making a mental pilgrimage, gained favor as well. The practice of modern devotion was not dependent on the revering of cult images, instead it constituted a long thought process, but its emergence among the learned gives proof to the obsession Western Europeans had with communing with God through his intercessors.

This trend is visible in Van der Weyden's *Baldelin Triptych* and Van Eyck's *Madonna and Child Enthroned with saints and Canon Joris van der Peale,* both of which Rothstein has dealt with considerably. He argues that the *Baldelin Triptych* shows off different types of seeing. Most central to his argument is the image of the Virgin and Child that appears to Octavian, which the emperor bows to. This for Rothstein indicates that there is power in an image if it represents a powerful being. Octavian acknowledges the divine majesty of Christ in the representation, not as a "mere image of a child on a mother's lap,"[48] but as the true being. To a degree this notion can be applied to MS.MR.10's Madonna and Child miniature. The viewer is

[46] Rothstein, *Sight and Spirituality in Early Netherlandish Painting*, 10.
[47]Craig Harbison, *Jan van Eyck: The Play of Realism* (Seattle: Reaktion Books, 1991), 178-182.
[48] Rothstein, *Sight and Spirituality in Early Netherlandish Painting*, 26.

meant to regard the tempera on parchment as an embodiment of the holy figures, placed in front of them to be venerated. Rothstein writes that Van Eyck's *Canon van der Peale* depicts the stage after initially viewing a cult image, such as MS.MR.10's Madonna and Child, during which one's "meditation [is] so complete that it does not rely on, but in fact transcends, sensory stimulation."[49] Within the altarpiece, the Canon kneels before the Virgin, his eyes unfocused and glasses removed as he looks past her, alluding to his possible turning inward.[50] These paintings show the viewer the "way from seeing to knowing" after consulting a devotional image.[51] While intellectual seeing is perhaps not meant to be achieved with the Madonna and Child image, it is interesting to note that other scholars have read paintings of the same type of scene as depicting the moment one attains that goal.Jean Gerson, the 14th century author of the *Mountain of Contemplation* , wrote that "...we ought thus to learn to transcend with our minds from these visible things to the invisible, from the corporeal to the spiritual. For this is the purpose of the image."[52] MS.MR.10's Madonna and Child seems to be a product of Gerson's sentiments.

MS.MR.10 emerges from a period in which seeking imageless devotion or a visionary experience and regarding cult images as prototypes for the real beings was mainstream. As these beliefs spread across Europe people outside of the intellectual and ecclesiastical settings must have become aware of them. Both the *Baldelin Triptych* and the *Virgin and Child with Canon van der Peale* were painted about 100 years before OSU's Book of Hours was produced, and the thoughts of Gerson were published even earlier. Their beliefs and the messages the paintings make clear would have had time to become a part of normal religious life. The Madonna and

[49] Rothstein, *Sight and Spirituality in Early Netherlandish Painting,* 52.
[50] Rothstein, *Sight and Spirituality in Early Netherlandish Painting,* 50.
[51] Rothstein, "Vision, Cognition, and Self-Reflection in Rogier van der Weyden's Baldelin Triptych," *Zeittschrift fur Kunstgeshchite* (2001): 55.
[52] Rothstein, *Sight and Spirituality in Early Netherlandish Painting,* 57-58.

Child image is a result of these beliefs- it tries to incite communion between the viewer and the Virgin through its attempt at illusionism. Thus, as a devotional object rendered in a vernacular manner, MS.MR.10 does not lose its spiritual authority. While its imagery is not mimetic, and its figures were created by a hasty, unstable hand, it can still offer an effective devotional experience to its viewer. The Madonna and Child illumination in particular captivates the viewer despite its unconvincing trompe l'oeil effects, reminding those who gaze upon it that it is simultaneously an exemplar of the Virgin and Christ and merely a book painting.

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Figure 1: Madonna and Child, MS.MR.10, Angouleme, France, c. 1540

Figure 2: Pentecost, Presentation at the Temple, Nativity, Adoration of the Magi, MS.MR.10, Angouleme, France, c. 1540

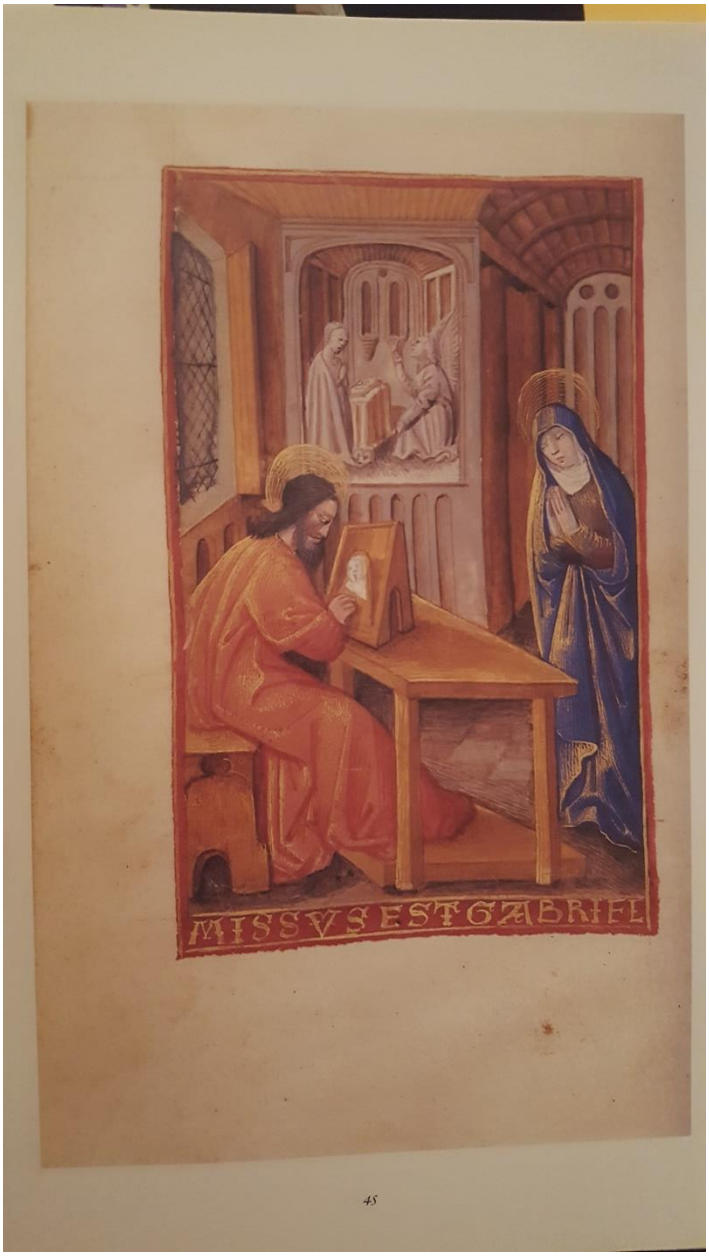

Figure 3: Luke Painting the Virgin, Hours for Rome Use. France, Bourges, c.1480 (MS M.330, fol. 9v), from Wieck, Roger. *Painted Prayers: The Book of Hours in Medieval and Renaissance Art.* New York: George Braziller, 1997.

Figure 4: Nativity, Hours for Rome use, France, c. 1515, Rare Books and Manuscripts Library at the Ohio State University

Figure 5: Simon Bening, *Stein Quadriptych*, Bruges, 1525-1530

Figure 6: Jan van Eyck, *Madonna Enthroned*, oil on panel, 1436

Figure 7: St. John and St. Luke, MS.MR.10, Angouleme, France, c. 1540